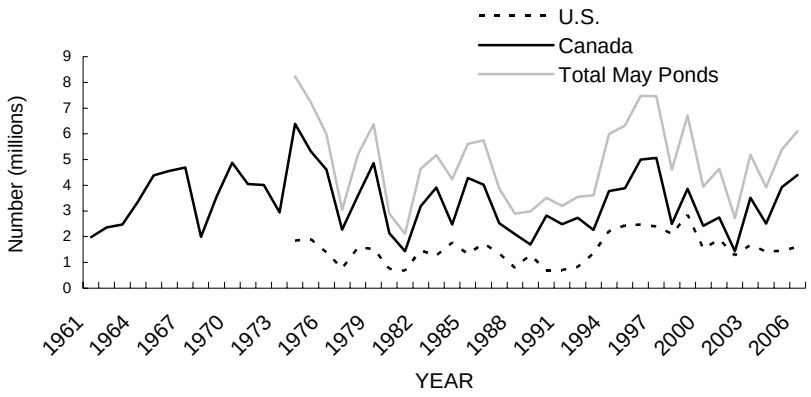
2006 DUCK AND WETLAND STATUS

Each May and July, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) coordinates extensive surveys of waterfowl and wetlands in primary breeding areas of the U.S. and Canada. They have suspended July surveys the past three years due to budgetary constraints, but are scheduled to resume them as funding allows.

Figure 6. Number of May Ponds in the traditional survey areas of the U.S. and Canada.



Wetland Conditions:

Numbers of wetlands, termed "May ponds" reflect habitat conditions for duck pairs in the spring. Summer rains in 2005 followed by average to above average precipitation in spring 2006 contributed to improved habitat conditions with the pond count for the U.S. and Canadian prairies and Canadian parklands (6.1 million) up 13% from 2005 and 26% above the long-term average (Figure 6). The most significant improvements occurred in Alberta and the northern grassland and parkland regions of Manitoba and Saskatchewan. The prairies of southern Alberta provide some of the most important nesting habitat for pintail, but the quality of this habitat declined due to drought since 1998 with the exception of 2003. The drought has now abated and May pond numbers increased 33% from last year and are now 38% above the long-term average (Table 4). Spring rains and high water tables in the northern grassland and parkland regions of Manitoba and Saskatchewan delayed farm work; vegetation around the perimeters of wetland responded resulting in good nesting cover. Ample water in permanent and semi-permanent wetlands along with abundant flooded emergent vegetation likely benefited nesting diving ducks. Preliminary summer reports suggest that conditions have become slightly drier in Prairie Canada, but conditions are still good to very good with the exception of northern Alberta where it is still very dry.

Table 4. Percent change in habitat and population indices from 2005 (05) and the long-term average (LT) among breeding ground regions.

	May Ponds		Breeding Ducks		Mallards	
Region	**vs 05**	**vs LT**	**vs 05**	**vs LT**	**vs 05**	**vs LT**
E. Dakotas	+29%	+4%	+12%	+23%	+21%	+92%
W.Dakotas/MT	-7%	+16%	+48%	+18%	+76%	+36%
S. Alberta	+33%	+38%	+44%	+7%	+34%	-18%
S. Saskatchewan	+13%	+38%	+27%	+37%	+6%	-12%
S. Manitoba	-3%	+9%	+10%	+16%	+12%	+35%

Spring habitat conditions were much more variable in the U.S. prairie pothole region with the overall number of May Ponds near the long-term average (Table 4). The eastern most portions of

the Dakota's contained good habitat at the time of the May survey, but the Drift Prairie, the Missouri Coteau, and Coteau slope were in fair to poor condition. During the summer months, conditions have continued to deteriorate; and as of July, moderate to severe drought gripped much of South Dakota and North Dakota.

Duck Populations:
The duck population estimate of 36.2 million in the traditional survey area is 14% above last year's estimate of 31.7 million and 9% above the 1955-2005 long-term average. Duck populations in the parkland and grassland regions of Canada continued their upward trend that began in 2005. In southern Alberta, duck numbers increased 27% from 2004 to 2005, another 38% from 2005 to 2006, and are now 7% above their long-term average. In southern Saskatchewan, breeding duck numbers increased 38% from 2004 to 2005, another 27% from 2005 to 2006, and are now 37% above their long-term average (Table 4). Numbers of breeding ducks in eastern North Dakota and South Dakota increased 12% from 2005 and are now 23% above their long-term average.

Mallard abundance (7.3 million) remains similar to 2005 (6.8 million) and the long-term average (7.5 million). However, mallard numbers are up in the primary areas used by mallards that migrate through Missouri (Table 4). Survey results suggest good news for canvasback and pintail. The canvasback population estimate (691,000) increased 33% from 2005 and is now 23% above the long-term average. Pintail numbers (3.4 million) increased by 32%, but remain 18% below their long-term average. Other duck species that increased in abundance from 2005 include blue-winged teal (5.9 million, +23%), green-winged teal (2.6 million, +20%), gadwall (2.8 million, +30%), and redheads (0.9 million, +55%). The shoveler estimate (3.7 million) remains similar to 2005, but is still 69% above the long-term average. Wigeon (2.2 million) and scaup (3.2 million) estimates are about the same as last year, but 17% and 37% below their respective long-term averages. The scaup estimate was a record low for the second consecutive year.

Mallard Fall Flight:
Projections of the mallard fall flight are based on historic relationships among breeding duck numbers, habitat conditions, adult survival, and expected fall age ratios and duck numbers. A 2006 breeding population estimate of 7.9 million mid-continent mallards (7.3 million in the traditional survey area plus .6 million in Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin), is similar to the 2005 estimate of 7.5 million. The fall flight index for mallards is projected to be 9.8 million which is also similar to the 2005 projection of 9.3 million.